Ministry of Agriculture and Food

Ontario

Factsheet

ORGANIZATIONS ASSESSING THEIR NEEDS

Don Cameron and **Susan Humphries**, Rural Organizations and Services Branch,
Doug Pletsch, Rural Extension Studies, University of Guelph

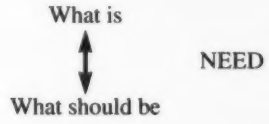
INTRODUCTION

How often do organizations review what they have done, are doing and plan to do? How closely do activities they list correspond to what the organization intended? Should any changes be made? If so, what changes are necessary and how are they best accomplished?

By answering the worksheet questions in this Factsheet, an indication of the needs of the organization should result. Each number below refers to the numbered questions on the worksheet.

First, let's define what is meant by a need.

A need is the gap between what is and what should be. A need is the difference between the results we are currently achieving and the results we wish to achieve. In assessing needs we are attempting to identify and priorize those needs we consider most important.



WHAT IS

1. **Name of Organization**
   Does the name of the organization tell the general public what the organization is all about? What will a change of name do to the focus of the organization?
2. **Reasons For Existence: Purpose**
   Periodically, an organization should review its mandate (or purpose for existing), and who it is trying to serve. Time must be spent thinking about what is being done and whether it can be done better. Are there new areas to consider and others that could or should be dropped? What can be done to ensure that any changes will be accepted by the membership?
3. **What is the Organization Doing?**
   Most organizations will have a constitution and a set of bylaws together with a general set of objectives. Many groups will set aside time to plan a yearly program and, at that time, review their objectives and plan specific accomplishments. For example, a general objective might be to encourage everyone interested in the concerns of the organization to become a member. A more specific objective might be to increase the membership of the organization by 20%.
4. **How is the Organization Doing in its Major Areas of Activity?**
   In your opinion, and in the opinion of other members, how is your organization doing? How does the membership feel about members' involvement in activities of the organization and the services provided?
5. **How Do Others Feel?**
   It may be useful to get the opinion of some non-members in order to assess outside opinion. Information can and should be collected from various sources. This type of information, because of its variety, will increase understanding and insight.

WHAT SHOULD BE

6. **What You Want For Your Organization**
   The process of finding out where the organization should be going is almost the same as trying to determine where it is now. But in this case, pull out all the stops, dream a little and let all the ideas come forth. Gather ideas from others inside and outside the organization. Participation by many people is needed to acquire the information to make accurate judgments. It is also much easier to gain member and community support if many people have been involved. If your organization involves many in helping to determine goals, there will be more commitment when you start to make changes to achieve them.

90-01818/

7. **Community Concerns**

Is the organization in touch with people in the community? Have priorities changed and has the organization adapted to those changes?

8. **Information Collection**

There are many ways to collect information. If you choose to interview people or send questionnaires, be careful to select a good cross section of people (a random sample) and prepare your questions carefully to ensure accurate responses. Make questions simple and to the point. An organization without interview or questionnaire experience can contact the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food office for help. Here are some other suggestions for getting information.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

INDIVIDUALS

(both inside & outside the organization)

GROUPS

(committees can be formed to provide information)

PUBLIC SOURCES

(review news clippings, public statements, gov't publications)

ORGANIZATIONAL RECORDS

(review your minutes, reports, studies, evaluations)

9. **Information Analysis**

First, sort out what people are saying about the organization. Second, find out how frequently various items are being mentioned. Based on your analysis, certain directions will become clearer. For example, newsclippings and other public documents and statements may emphasize a theme; your members may be suggesting ideas for organization activities. Non-members may give the organization clues as to why they are successful or not successful in attracting members.

10. **Action**

Based on the findings from above, you will have recommendations for change. You will have some needs identified and some goals indicated. Now you have to set priorities and develop specific action plans. You must assess your expertise and financial resources to carry out new goals and plans. You should ensure you are not duplicating the good work of others. At this final stage, the OMAF Factsheet *Program Planning for Organizations*, Agdex 057 will be useful.

Good Luck.

WORKSHEET

ASSESSING NEEDS

WHAT IS

1. Name of the organization _____
2. Why does the organization exist; what is its purpose?

_____

_____

3. What is your organization doing right now, particularly in the following areas:

(a) **Membership** Why do people join or not join the organization? _____

_____

(b) **Activities** Are activities social, educational? How active are the committees? _____

_____

(c) **Uniqueness** Is the organization filling a special need?

_____

_____

_____

(d) **Other** _____

_____

_____

4. How is the organization doing in its major areas of activity? _____

_____

_____

5. How do others feel about the organization? _____

_____

_____

WHAT SHOULD BE

6. What would you like your organization to be doing in five years? _____

_____

7. What are concerns in your community that could be taken on by your organization? _____

_____

_____

8. How do you collect the information you need? (consider a brief telephone survey, mail questionnaire, brainstorming meeting, supermarket survey)

_____

_____

_____

9. What will you do with the information? _____

_____

10. What recommendations can be made? (eg. What do you want to accomplish in the next 12 months?)

_____

_____

_____

FACTSHEET RESOURCES

Roger Kaufman and Fenwick W. English *Needs Assessment: Concept and Application* Educational Technology Publications, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1979. Fenwick W. English and Roger A. Kaufman *Needs Assessment: A focus for Curriculum Development*. Washington D.C. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975. Donald G. Hays and Joan K. Linn Edited by Garry R. Walz and Libly Benjamin. *Needs Assessment! Who Needs It?* Washington D.C. ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center and American School Counselor Association 1977. Donald J. Blackburn *Extension Handbook*. Guelph, University of Guelph, 1984.

10M

ISSN 0225-7882